ASIAN-CANADIAN STUFF FOR THE REST OF US
ISSUE TWO – SUMMER 2003

bambooda

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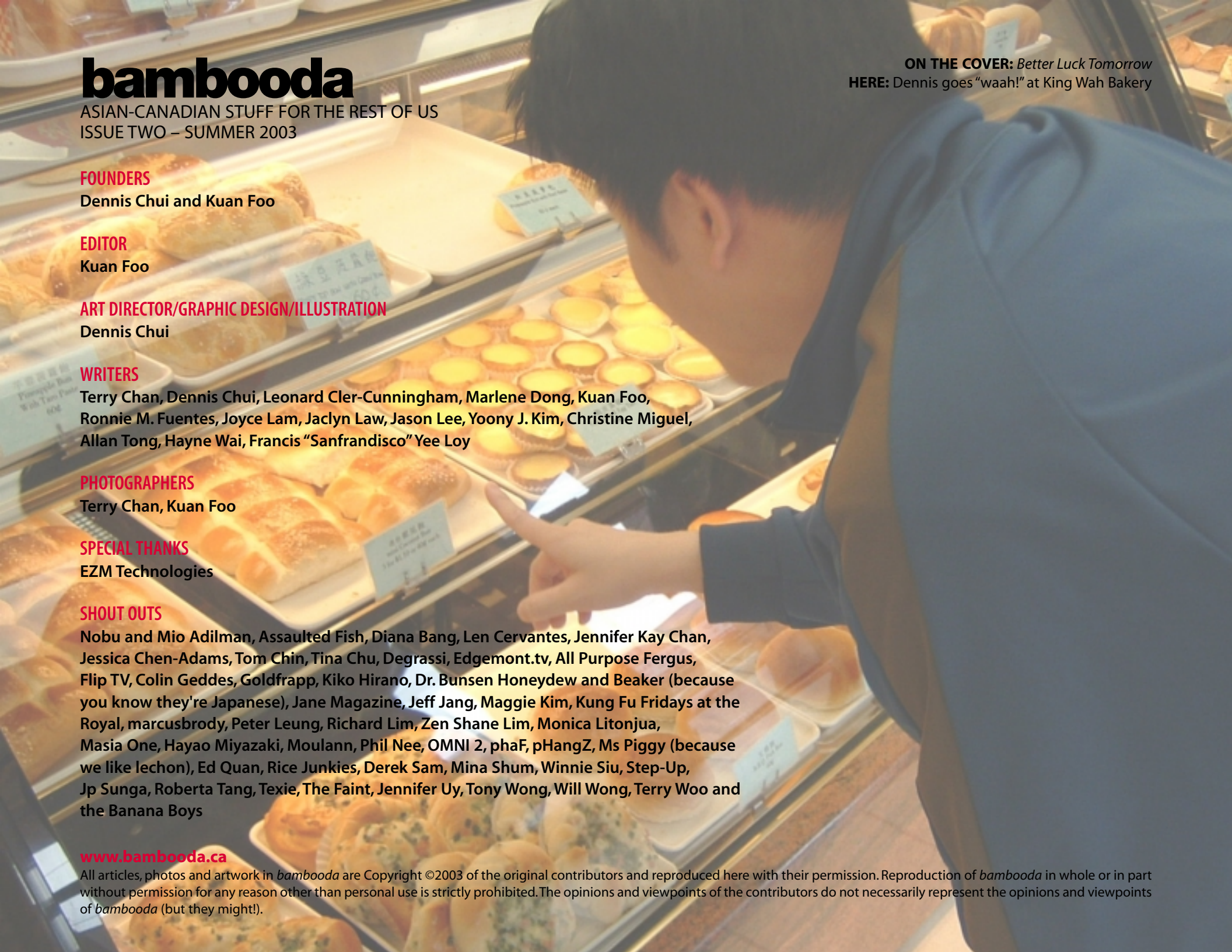
ON THE COVER: *Better Luck Tomorrow*
HERE: Dennis goes "waah!" at King Wah Bakery



FOUNDERS
Dennis Chui and Kuan Foo

EDITOR
Kuan Foo

ART DIRECTOR/GRAPHIC DESIGN/ILLUSTRATION
Dennis Chui

WRITERS
Terry Chan, Dennis Chui, Leonard Cler-Cunningham, Marlene Dong, Kuan Foo, Ronnie M. Fuentes, Joyce Lam, Jaclyn Law, Jason Lee, Yoony J. Kim, Christine Miguel, Allan Tong, Hayne Wai, Francis "Sanfrandisco" Yee Loy

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Terry Chan, Kuan Foo

SPECIAL THANKS
EZM Technologies

SHOUT OUTS
Nobu and Mio Adilman, Assaulted Fish, Diana Bang, Len Cervantes, Jennifer Kay Chan, Jessica Chen-Adams, Tom Chin, Tina Chu, Degrassi, Edgemont.tv, All Purpose Fergus, Flip TV, Colin Geddes, Goldfrapp, Kiko Hirano, Dr. Bunsen Honeydew and Beaker (because you know they're Japanese), Jane Magazine, Jeff Jang, Maggie Kim, Kung Fu Fridays at the Royal, marcusbrody, Peter Leung, Richard Lim, Zen Shane Lim, Monica Litonjua, Masia One, Hayao Miyazaki, Moulann, Phil Nee, OMNI 2, phaF, pHangZ, Ms Piggy (because we like lechon), Ed Quan, Rice Junkies, Derek Sam, Mina Shum, Winnie Siu, Step-Up, Jp Sunga, Roberta Tang, Texie, The Faint, Jennifer Uy, Tony Wong, Will Wong, Terry Woo and the Banana Boys

www.bambooda.ca

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FOUNDERS' MESSAGE

They say the first issue is the hardest. "They" have no idea what they are talking about. The first issue is fuelled by the thrill of novelty, of unbridled possibility, of seeing your work come to fruition for the first time. When it is finally complete, you feel the warm glow of satisfaction and pride as your baby is trotted out for the world's approval. This feeling lasts approximately ten minutes or until you realize that you have to do it all over again.

Which is all a longwinded way of saying this second issue of *bambooda* could have been a bit of a slog. That it wasn't can be directly linked to the talented contributors who volunteered their time and skills to create this issue. We are grateful to them for making it fun for us.

Finally, we'd like to thank all the people who read the first issue and sent us feedback or story ideas, or even just took the time to recommend *bambooda* to their friends. We're doing this for you.

Peace and love,
Kuan Foo
Dennis Chui
May 2003

KUAN FOO

WHERE I LIVE:
Largely in my head.

WHAT I DO:
Spend a lot of time justifying my existence.

I ENJOY…
…attempting difficult novels, writing high concept comedy sketches, dancing like a squirrel on crack, taking long contemplative walks, working whenever necessary and sleeping whenever possible.

THREE WEBSITES I VISIT REGULARLY:
www.bourque.org, www.salon.com, www.zefrank.com

MY THREE FAVOURITE ALBUMS OF THE MOMENT:
Various Artists, *A Mighty Wind Soundtrack*; ABBA, *Gold*; Various Artists, *Japan for Sale, Vol. 3*.

LAST THREE MOVIES I SAW:
Metropolis (the 1927 Fritz Lang silent film), *Spirited Away* and *Better Luck Tomorrow*

MY FAVOURITE FOOD OR RESTAURANT:
Sha-Lin Noodle House (it gave Dennis the trots, but I am made of sterner stuff).

IF I HAD A SUPERPOWER, IT WOULD BE…
…bullshit detection.

IF MY LIFE WERE A MOVIE, IT WOULD BE…
…kind of like a heterosexual male version of *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

YOU SHOULD GET TO KNOW ME BECAUSE…
…I am always the designated driver.

DENNIS CHUI

WHERE I LIVE:
Right here

WHAT I DO:
After-school, eating stuff thingies

I ENJOY...
...myself.

THREE WEBSITES I VISIT REGULARLY:
www.imdb.com,
www.midnighteye.com,
www.gigposters.com

MY THREE FAVOURITE ALBUMS OF THE MOMENT:
The Faint, *Danse Macabre*; Goldfrapp, *Black Cherry;* Bis, *Return to Central*.

LAST THREE MOVIES I SAW:
Second Name (Spain/UK), *My Tutor Friend* (Korea) and *A Guy Thing* (what a piece of shit!).

MY FAVOURITE FOOD OR RESTAURANT:
Sushi, more sushi, even more sushi, Korean bulgogi with kochujang and spicy cuisines from around the world.

IF I HAD A SUPERPOWER, IT WOULD BE...
...to tell if something's REALLY gone bad or not

IF MY LIFE WERE A MOVIE, IT WOULD BE...
...a Russ Meyer movie.

YOU SHOULD GET TO KNOW ME BECAUSE...
...I can get you "stuff."

CONTRIBUTORS

LEONARD CLER-CUNNINGHAM

WHERE I LIVE:
In a state of perpetual confusion

WHAT I DO:
Endlessly screw myself by believing in the capacity of people to live up to their potential.

I ENJOY...
...the sense of amazement, awe and gratitude that happens when people, despite the circumstances, lack of reward and personal cost, live up to their potential (today's winners in the people in my neighbourhood are heroic: Nancy Olivieri, David Healy, John Lowman, V.J. Modi and Russel Ogden).

THREE WEBSITES I VISIT REGULARLY:
I read books and newspapers and remain firmly convinced that beyond email the only purpose of the Internet seems to be getting men to spend money in hopes of having a larger penis.

MY THREE FAVOURITE ALBUMS OF THE MOMENT:
The Alan Lomax Collection, Frank Sinatra's live version of "I've Got You Under My Skin" and the Be Good Tanya's *Chinatown*.

LAST THREE MOVIES I SAW:
Maid in Manhattan, some Jay and Bob thing, and some other kid's film (I have an 11 year old daughter, Hailey Lewis, who gets to pick the films we watch and is of course the most amazing person to walk on the face of the earth).

MY FAVOURITE FOOD OR RESTAURANT:
The Lion's Den (Vancouver), Cafe La Gaffe (Toronto), The Brunswick Tavern (London, Ontario) – all three have unique character and history which could never be imitated nor repeated anywhere else. Oh and Slickety Jim's (Vancouver) because I get a free meal if I ever can squeeze it into a piece.

IF I HAD A SUPERPOWER, IT WOULD BE...
...the power of resurrection (I miss my Mom).

IF MY LIFE WERE A MOVIE, IT WOULD BE...
...I'd like it to be a romance where despite the odds the guy gets the girl of his dreams. In my case that's Alana Hirsh who should come back to Vancouver so we can start living happily ever after.

YOU SHOULD GET TO KNOW ME BECAUSE...
...you would discover that, although your mother was right when she warned you not to hang out with those people because they're up to no good and you'll only end up in trouble, I am a hell of a lot of fun and you'll probably end up doing cool stuff that you can brag about to your friends.

JASON "CHAR SIU BAO" LEE

WHERE I LIVE:
For some strange reason, consistently with white people.

WHAT I DO:
I live off my friends' miseries so I feel better about myself.

I ENJOY...
...winning mass quantities of alcohol from Leonard Cler-Cunningham, exploiting his belief in people's capacity to live up to their potential. Whatta moroon.

THREE WEBSITES I VISIT REGULARLY:
I ain't fallin' for this trap.

MY THREE FAVOURITE ALBUMS OF THE MOMENT:
Andrea Bocelli's *Romanza*, Pink Martini's *Sympathique* and the *Saturday Morning Cartoons* collection.

LAST THREE MOVIES I SAW:
Nine Queens, *About a Boy* and *Unfaithful* (the last being the Blockbuster Video free rental. Honest).

MY FAVOURITE FOOD OR RESTAURANT:
Slickety Jim's (Hey Michael, do I get a kickback like Len or is it just for white guys?).

IF I HAD A SUPERPOWER, IT WOULD BE...
...the power to go back in time, if for no other reason than to waste it even more so.

IF MY LIFE WERE A MOVIE, IT WOULD BE...
...West Side Story, but with less dancing and more singing.

YOU SHOULD GET TO KNOW ME BECAUSE...
...my mom says I'm cool.

MARLENE DONG

WHERE I LIVE:
Vancouver (home of the Canucks!!!)

WHAT I DO:
Writer by day, Editor by night.

I ENJOY...
...consuming 2L of ice cream in one sitting.

CONTRIBUTORS

THREE WEBSITES I VISIT REGULARLY:
www.buffyguide.com,
www.monsoonmag.com,
www.m-w.com

MY THREE FAVOURITE ALBUMS OF THE MOMENT:
None. I'm tone deaf after listening to *Momma Dong Live* on Karaoke.

LAST THREE MOVIES I SAW:
(worth mentioning) *Y Tu Mama Tambien*, *The Pianist*, *The Great Gatsby* (1974)

MY FAVOURITE FOOD OR RESTAURANT:
Ice cream

IF I HAD A SUPERPOWER, IT WOULD BE...
I.I.O. (Instant Information Osmosis)

IF MY LIFE WERE A MOVIE, IT WOULD BE...
...not a wrap yet.

YOU SHOULD GET TO KNOW ME BECAUSE...
...I'm not tepid water.

YOONY JUDY KIM

WHERE I LIVE:
Van., BC

WHAT I DO:
Commander of a gang of 21 who have no morals at all. (Did I mention that they are all six and seven years old?)

I ENJOY...
...food, cooking, shopping for deals, being obsessively and compulsively neat and clean, recounting my days minute by minute

THREE WEBSITES I VISIT REGULARLY:
www.livejournal.com,
www.sephora.com and www.bbc.co.uk

MY THREE FAVOURITE ALBUMS OF THE MOMENT:
Leisure Occasional Music 1.0 (www.leisuresound.com),
Music from Crowned King (http://www.crownedking.com),
Moulin Rouge Soundtrack.

LAST THREE MOVIES I SAW:
Nemesis, *Anger Management*, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

MY FAVOURITE FOOD OR RESTAURANT:
Restaurants: the Salmon House on the Hill (www.salmonhouse.com) (West Van), Brass Monkey (English Bay), YYZ (Toronto). Food and drink: Pacific North-Western cuisine, martinis, chicken wings, sashimi, kimchi.

IF I HAD A SUPERPOWER, IT WOULD BE...
...cooking at the speed of light.

IF MY LIFE WERE A MOVIE, IT WOULD BE...
No movie, no matter how bad, has enough plot holes to be indicative of my life.

YOU SHOULD GET TO KNOW ME BECAUSE...
...I'm nice and if I like you, I'll cook for you.

ALLAN TONG

WHERE I LIVE:
Toronto

WHAT I DO:
Make movies.

I ENJOY...
...nothing legal.

THREE WEBSITES I VISIT REGULARLY:
www.indiewire.com,
www.theredalbum.com,
www.asian-nation.org

MY THREE FAVOURITE ALBUMS OF THE MOMENT:
Beck's Ann Arbor Concert, 2002 (bootleg), Emm Gryner's *Asianblue*, Otis Redding's *Otis Blue*.

LAST THREE MOVIES I SAW:
Student Loan by Mike Johnston, *Brief Crossing* by Catherine Breillat, *Wheel of Time* by Werner Herzog.

MY FAVOURITE FOOD OR RESTAURANT:
Dim sum.

IF I HAD A SUPERPOWER, IT WOULD BE...
... to live longer

IF MY LIFE WERE A MOVIE, IT WOULD BE...
...*Bowfinger*.

YOU SHOULD GET TO KNOW ME BECAUSE...
...I'll be rich and famous one day, babe.

CONTRIBUTORS

FRANCIS YEE LOY
AKA SANFRANDISCO, SUPASTAR DJ :)

WHERE I LIVE:
LimboLand, Toronto, Ontario

WHAT I DO:
By day, a Stock & Equity Trade Assistant at CIBC World Markets. By night, a DJ rockstar. I also scrounge up enough time to host the "Full Moon" radio show which airs Tuesdays from 10-11pm on CKLN 88.1 FM.

I ENJOY...
...long walks on the beach, riding horses with the wind in my hair and Mariah Carey

THREE WEBSITES I VISIT REGULARLY...
www.dvdfile.com,
www.macrumors.com,
www.mariahdaily.com

MY THREE FAVOURITE ALBUMS OF THE MOMENT...
Jamiroquai – *Emergency On Planet Earth* (Orenda/Sony Soho Square), *Grandmaster Flash presents Salsoul Jam 2000* (Salsoul Records), Semisonic – *Feeling Strangely Fine* (MCA)

LAST THREE MOVIES I SAW...
X-Men 2 (bring on *X3*!), *House of 1000 Corpses* (more like *House of 1000 Horror Movie Rip-Offs*), *Lesbian Spank Inferno*

MY FAVOURITE FOOD OR RESTAURANT...
Food wise: any kind of Dessert; Sushi and Seafood of any sort, especially crab and lobster; Korean BBQ.
Restaurant wise: Chung King Garden (behind Pacific Mall in Markham); Truffles at the Four Seasons Hotel; New Ho King; Nami

IF I HAD A SUPERPOWER, IT WOULD BE...
...the ability to make people dance like crazy, or maybe the power to stop time, because I don't have enough to do all the things I want to do in life!

IF MY LIFE WERE A MOVIE, IT WOULD BE...
...*The Facts of Life Go To Paris*

YOU SHOULD GET TO KNOW ME BECAUSE...
...you can't really know me from just a few paragraphs! Plus, I might give you one of my fantastic mix CDs!

yellowfellow
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available at

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1800 Sheppard Ave E
416-502-3678

SPY LAB
247 Queen St W
416-599-4779

USATO
49 Kensington Ave
416-591-1043

JEANS FASHION
Pacific Mall, 4300 Steeles E
905-946-8890

MECA
1st Markham Place,
3255 Hwy 7 E
905-944-8543

and online at...
YELLOWFELLOW.COM

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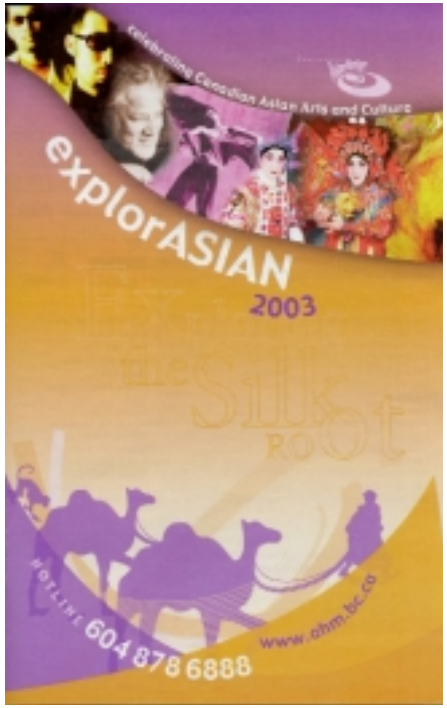
FINDING THE BALANCE: WHY I SUPPORT ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

By Joyce Lam



When I was younger, growing up as an Asian girl in a white society left a bitter taste — and I am not referring to the flavour of bitter melons. In grade school, I felt ashamed when my family did not know the right "Canadian" customs. I remember bringing store-bought cookies to class parties when all the white kids' brought homemade cookies decorated to suit the occasion. I did not know not to bring a raw egg to school to decorate for Easter; how my cheeks burned when it broke in class and everyone laughed at me. I was embarrassed at my parents' poor English at parent/teacher's night. Add to that the stigma of looking visibly different and I found myself constantly wondering how I could belong.

I felt that the only way I could be like the other kids was to assimilate, to melt into the prevailing culture. As a kid, teenager and young adult, that meant denying my "Chinese-ness" and focusing on being white. I perfected my English, learned to like cheese, hung around white friends and thought white guys were to die for.

But then I grew up. I discovered that being different wasn't a bad thing but a good thing. I discovered there was pride in being between two different cultures. I found others similar to me and made friends. I saw successful Asian-Canadians. I admired the beauty of Chinese calligraphy. I took conversational Cantonese classes and grew to appreciate my parents' challenge in coming to Canada without English. I took a trip to China to visit my parents' villages. I co-founded the Vancouver Asian Canadian Theatre company to help combat traditional Asian stereotypes. I found the balance of being both Chinese and Canadian.

I learned that I didn't have to choose between my two cultures, that I could be both and that I am both. I participate in Asian Heritage Month each May to celebrate my newfound "Asian-ness." I encourage all Asian-Canadians to take part in Asian Heritage Month and reclaim your history and heritage. It is amazing at how you will find peace with yourself.

JOYCE LAM is the president of Vancouver Asian Canadian Theatre (VACT)

D'OH, CANADA…!

Fresh from the department of "What the...?" comes the official 2003 Asian Heritage Month poster released by the Department of Canadian Heritage. On it are a jolly bunch of "Asians" — many with slitty eyes, one actually wearing a coolie hat — gratefully clutching at the Canadian flag as if to say, "Thank you, Canada! Thank you for letting us into your country and allowing us to touch your flag!" Aside from the dated depictions of Asian physiognomy, the illustration reinforces the stereotype that Asian-Canadians are exotic, foreign and perpetual immigrants, which runs counter to the aim of Asian Heritage Month stated (with unintentional irony) in the text accompanying the image:

> *Asian Heritage Month offers all Canadians an opportunity to learn more about the history of Asian Canadians and to celebrate their contributions to the growth and prosperity of Canada.*

Senator Vivienne Poy, when questioned about the poster that she had originally endorsed, backtracked sharply stating that she had expressed reservations about the image but was informed by Canadian Heritage that there was no time to make changes or consult with the community. However, she wished to assure her supporters that she did not see herself reflected in the poster (and she's right! There are no wealthy Ottawa socialites to be seen anywhere!). Canadian Heritage Minister Sheila Copps was even less forthcoming, stating "I'm not going to [discuss] art." (Note: Copps is running for the Liberal Party leadership under the banner of inclusiveness. As was observed by Susan Eng in the *Globe and Mail*, "I hope she doesn't mean to say: 'My Canada includes coolies.'")

We at *bambooda* are always willing to help out our government, so we offer up the following 10 lame excuses … er, reasons why such a travesty could ever have occurred:

1. It's the official government salute to the Chinese-Canadian Head Tax payers in lieu of a formal apology and redress.
2. We wanted to help YOUR people celebrate YOUR culture.
3. You've just filed your income taxes and we wanted to show you your dollars at work.
4. They're squinting in pain over the stereotypical characters portrayed in the poster.
5. Couldn't find any Asians to run it by and the corner store was closed.
6. Wanted to save money by recycling an image from the 1950s.
7. Well, what do you expect from the Great White North?
8. It was a mistake! I asked for something "pleasant" not "peasant."
9. None of us have actually seen an Asian-Canadian as there don't seem to be any in the civil service.
10. We've screwed the First Nations over for centuries, and this surprises you?

– Compiled by KUAN FOO and HAYNE WAI

Hey Kids! Contact Canadian Heritage Minister Sheila Copps (coppss@parl.gc.ca) and Senator Vivienne Poy (poyv@sen.parl.gc.ca) and tell them what you think!

TERRY CHAN

CONFESSIONS OF A MALE SHOE-WHORE

By Terry Chan

Am I imagining things or is the "shoe obsession" baton passed from boys to girls as they enter adulthood? Most women I know claim to have been tomboys when they were teenagers, however upon reaching adulthood they suddenly acquire shoe fetishes of spectacular proportions. Conversely, most men, who will now gladly wear the same pair of beat-up loafers 24/7, spent their adolescence lusting after a bewildering assortment of fancy sneakers.

Boys in the spiky-haired, Oxy-faced age bracket fall for flashy shoes the way your parents lust after designer university degrees. Athletic footwear is a multi-billion

dollar business that thrives on teenage boys' endless desire for flamboyant runners. Over the years, numerous footwear technologies have kept teens spend-happy, most notably the Nike Air, the Reebok Pump, Nike Shox and such. For young Asian males, there is an additional appeal: the complex sole-centred innovations of most of these shoes pack on precious inches of height. And believe me, unless you're one of those genetic freaks that is actually taller than 5'6", you will need all the elevation you can get. Unfortunately, being Asian can also present its own unique obstacles in obtaining the perfect shoe; your mom probably vetoed your choice of cool sneakers and bought you the Chinatown knock-offs sporting the Nike swoosh AND 3 Adidas stripes on the side.

No sport has produced as many variations on the basic athletic shoe as professional basketball. This is only fitting for a league that features a 5'3" point guard and a 7'5" Chinese guy; I mean let's face it, the NBA has more weird creatures than Australia. Accordingly, basketball shoes come in a multitude of strange designs whose sole (ha ha) point of commonality is that they all command north of $150. Clever marketing campaigns ensure that even most sports-challenged teenage boys (or rather, their parents) continue to contribute to the Nike CEO's yacht fund.

In fact, Nike is so successful in marketing basketball shoes, its flagship Air Jordan line continues to score big even after its namesake pissed away his legacy by playing for the Washington Wizards. Nike introduced the first Jordan shoes in 1984, and has been updating that line of sneakers every year. As recently as last year, the venerable Jordan line was still going strong its 18th iteration: the Jordan XVIII (that's right, they name these shoes as if they were British monarchs).

As boys enter their twenties, sneakers naturally take a backseat in favour of other interests (remember those former tomboys?), however, it doesn't have to be that way. In fact, the twenty-something Asian male, with his requisite position as an engineer/programmer/dentist/banker, now has the purchasing power for these $200 showboats-on-feet with all the colourful plastic trimmings. The former-tomboy-turned-girlfriend may not fathom his love for sneakers, but she will dismiss it as just one of those "guy things." Even though our not-so-young friend still may not be able to dunk a basketball, he can show his manly athletic prowess and display a cunning sense of fashion simply by wearing the latest high-tops. Besides, with the punishing ride he receives from the lowered and stiffened suspension of his tricked-out import, he'll need all the cushioning he can get.

As our friend (reluctantly) enters middle age, he will eventually relinquish the role of the male shoe-whore to his son. His son will pull him by his sleeve to the local Footlocker to show him the latest Jordan XXXVII on the shelf that he wants for the upcoming school year. Our friend will argue that junior still has the perfectly serviceable Jordan XXXVI at home that he barely wears. The kid will stomp and whine for the new XXXVII. Dad will cave in and shell out XXXXXXXXXXX dollars. The former-tomboy-turned-girlfriend-turned-wife will give him >#%!?$&*< for wasting money and spoiling the kid again.

But that's all good with him; after all, the shoe's on the other foot now.

TERRY CHAN owns more shoes than Imelda Marcos.

Goodbye shift!

we'll miss u

GOODBYE SHIFT

By Dennis Chui

In March of 2003, *Shift Magazine*'s parent company stopped publishing this excellent Canadian magazine. On most newsstands, *Wired* once again ruled the roost. This is a sad situation because *Shift* offered commentary and criticism that I felt was more insightful and less techno-fetishistic than *Wired*. It also provided a much-needed Canadian voice in a publishing market dominated by American "maxims."

Fortunately, *Shift*'s website is still active, with new content being added all the time. Check out our Canadian brothers at **www.shift.com**.

DIRECTOR JUSTIN LIN HAS BEATEN THE ODDS IN GETTING HIS KINETIC AND CONTROVERSIAL ASIAN-AMERICAN FEATURE *BETTER LUCK TOMORROW* ***INTO WIDE DISTRIBUTION. THE ASIAN-NORTH AMERICAN AUDIENCE IS BUZZING, BUT WILL THE MAINSTREAM PAY ATTENTION?***

BY ALLAN TONG

THE BOY LUCK CLUB

PARAMOUNT PICTURES

JUSTIN LIN

phones from Vancouver to Toronto and apologizes for missing our interview 75 minutes earlier. His chat with the *New York Times* went overtime, and he's got to speak to a local TV station in an hour. "I have about 30 minutes now," Lin politely says slightly out of breath. It's mid-March and the director is in Vancouver to promote his controversial feature film, *Better Luck Tomorrow*, about four model high school students who fall into a spiral of theft, drugs and violence [see accompanying review for details]. Written, produced, and directed by Asian-Americans and starring an almost entirely Asian-American cast, *BLT* is the first such movie to gain wide release under a Hollywood studio. Many Asians believe *BLT* will launch Asian North American film, just like Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It* heralded black American cinema in 1986. Says Lin, "The talent is out there."

The hype and controversy surrounding *Better Luck Tomorrow* began after its third screening at last year's Sundance Film Festival when a white man in the audience stood up, turned to Lin and his cast and demanded, "How could you, despite your talented cast and great production values, make such a bleak, negative, amoral film? What kind of a portrait is this of Asian-Americans? Don't you have a responsibility to paint a more positive and helpful portrait of your community?"

Before Lin could respond, a familiar voice in the audience barked back. "What I find condescending and offensive about your statement is that nobody would say that to a bunch of white filmmakers, 'How can you do this to your people?'" As cheers rang out, Roger Ebert continued, "Asian-American characters have the right to be whoever the hell they want to be. They do not have to 'represent' their people."

The next day, another audience member voiced the same outrage. This time, *New York Times* critic Elvis Mitchell rose to *BLT's* defence. Meanwhile, three distributors were bidding over

LEFT: Justin Lin and the cast of *BLT*. RIGHT: l-r Virgil (Jason Tobin), Daric (Roger Fan), Ben (Parry Shen) and Han (Sung Kang).

PARAMOUNT PICTURES

BETTER LUCK TOMORROW'S ANTI-HEROES SHATTER THE MODEL MINORITY STEREOTYPE

the movie, five agents were clamouring to sign Lin, and magazines such as Variety were crowning Lin as one of the top 10 filmmakers to watch.

"Making a movie for Asian males wasn't the main reason [I made *BLT*]," confesses Lin. "I wanted to make a film that was important to me." Though his movie was named after the John Woo classic, *A Better Tomorrow*, the issue of Asian representation was secondary. "I was working a lot with youth. I coached them basketball, and there were these issues dealing with youth and violence," he says referring to the post-Columbine era.

Though it wasn't his plan, *BLT's* anti-heroes shatter the Model Minority stereotype of good, high-achieving, straight-A, Asian kids. *BLT's* anti-heroes are unapologetic, almost casual, about their violent excesses. Lin captures a rare sense of ennui from his fine cast, who portray characters adrift in a valueless world, ruled by sensation and desire.

"If we're staying true to making characters with three dimensions then that's positive. For Asians, we had Long Duk Dong in the eighties," explains Lin, referring to the nerdy Chinese student caricatured in John Hughes' insipid *Sixteen Candles*. "Now the Hollywood studios are casting Asians as the Model Minority. That's frustrating for Asian-American actors, because they're still playing one-dimensional characters."

Moreover, *BLT* presents Asian males for the first time on film as sexual animals whether it be at coke-snorting parties in suburban L.A or with a hooker in a Las Vegas motel room. Hollywood objectifies Asian

LEFT: Ben trying out for the basketball team. RIGHT: Virgil, Ben, Daric and Han have their backs against the wall.

women in countless films, but reduces Asian men to meek, sexless creatures or kung-fu fighting cartoons — if they appear at all. *BLT* presents a long-overdue alternative.

Though Lin insists *BLT* is not autobiographical, the movie is set in suburban Orange County where he grew up. He was raised working class in Los Angeles' Buena Park district after his parents bought a fish and chips shop on the way from Taiwan to Paraguay. The 31-year-old didn't catch the film bug until he saw Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing* and Francis Ford Coppola's *Tucker*, about the maverick carmaker whom Detroit's big automakers shut down. Lin later earned a B.A. and M.F.A. in film directing from the UCLA School of Film and Television, and co-directed 1998's uneven offbeat comedy, *Shopping For Fangs* [see review on page 47]. "I learned a lot by falling on my face," Lin affectionately recalls.

Lin scripted *BLT* with two collaborators as he juggled a 100-hour-a week editing job and hunted for production financing. "I couldn't raise money because no on else had done a hit Asian American film," he recalls. Most discouraging was a group of flaky Asian-American investors who insisted on changing *BLT's* characters to Latinos to make the movie more commercial.

Lin approached *BLT* as if it were the last film he'd ever make, maxing out 10 credit cards to the reported tune of US$200,000. Former rap star, Hammer, came through in the clutch with an additional $5,000 just as Lin was ready to shoot the movie guerrilla style on mini-DV or HD (high definition video) in February 2001. That abruptly changed when Fuji and Kodak read the script and offered Lin's producers cut-rate deals on 35mm film stock.

Despite working with little, *Better Luck Tomorrow's* Asian cast and filmmakers were driven by a sense of purpose. "From the earliest stages," says Lin "we felt a need to prove ourselves, right up to the distribution process."

Every year, Asian filmmakers in the U.S. and Canada complete a handful of feature films that play to appreciative audiences at ethnic film festivals then, if they're lucky, receive TV and video sales. A few, such as Mina Shum's *Long Life,*

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LEFT: Steve (John Cho) gives Stephanie (Karin Anna Cheung) a ride. RIGHT: Parry Shen on the set with director Justin Lin.

Happiness and Prosperity, will receive limited art-house releases but ignore the Asian audience altogether. The last Asian-American film to get wide commercial release was 1993's *Joy Luck Club*, but as it was based on Amy Tan's best-selling book, it already had a guaranteed audience. A movie starring unknown Asian-American actors made by a second-time Asian-American director was considered alien to the film world. So alien that Lin's previous feature, *Shopping For Fangs*, used to be stocked in the foreign DVDs section of Toronto's flagship HMV store.

At a business meeting, Lin was shown a pie chart of the American film going audience divided into blacks, Hispanics and whites. "Why are there no Asians?" he asked. He was told, "Their spending patterns are like Caucasians, so we classify them as such."

Rarely does a director offer an opinion on marketing his movie, but Lin insisted that Asians be included in the marketing plan along with MTV's 18–34 audience and the art house crowd. "At Sundance," he recalls, "they didn't even consider the Asian market. It's entirely new territory."

Further, Lin demanded from MTV Films that the release date be pushed back a few weeks so that he could tour and promote his film. His lone Canadian stop was Vancouver, though he missed Toronto, home to 400,000 Asians. "Maybe later," notes Lin.

BLT is breaking new ground by actively seeking the Asian populations of the U.S. and Canada in an electronic grass-roots campaign. Its fine website, **www.betterlucktomorrow.com**, overflows with information, pictures and movie clips, and offers a

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LIN WAS TOLD THAT ASIANS' SPENDING PATTERNS ARE LIKE CAUCASIANS, SO [THE STUDIO'S] CLASSIFY THEM AS SUCH...

ABOVE: Han shows us the money.

mailing list and fan club to keep *BLT's* fans updated on the latest reviews, openings, box office figures and media appearances. Similarly, a Yahoo fan group was recently launched to spread the word.

It also helps that recent hits — *Barbershop*, *Monsoon Wedding*, *Y Tu Mama Tambien* and the granddaddy of them all, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* — prove that "ethnic" films can reach their target audiences and crossover to the mainstream.

Lin believes that filmgoers "can vote with the tickets they buy." As the fastest growing ethnic group with above-average spending power, North America's 14 million Asians are a demographic that marketers are dying to capture. Nonetheless, Hollywood continues to overlook Asians and other minorities. According to a 2002 Screen Actors Guild of America report, Asian-Americans were cast for 2.5% of roles even though they make up 4.3% of the U.S. population. Moreover, these roles remain menial — typically waiters and delivery boys — or stereotypical — like martial artists and gangsters. Film studios don't make movies starring Asians, so audiences don't see these movies. And because audiences don't see Asian films, studios aren't encouraged to make them. *BLT* aims to break this self-perpetuating cycle and prove that Asians are indeed a movie-going audience, one that supports its films. "If only 10% of Asian North Americans see *BLT*," guesses Lin, "then studios will greenlight other Asian-American films."

Early returns look good. At the time of this writing, *BLT* had grossed US$983,259 over its first two weeks in limited release and was poised to go into wide release, increasing its screen presence almost tenfold. Though these figures are dwarfed beside those of the latest Hollywood blockbuster, *BLT's* initial expenditures were low. MTV Films reportedly paid US$500,000 for the film, and another US$1 million to promote it. *BLT* only has to gross a few million dollars to earn a profit.

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In one of *BLT's* pivotal scenes, Daric, the high school valedictorian, tempts his straight-laced classmate, Ben, into a world of crime, boasting "People like you and me? We don't have to play by the rules. We can make our own." Going his own way paid off for Justin Lin. He arrived at Sundance in January 2002 worried about paying his rent. Today he's developing movies with Spike Lee, HBO, indie producer Chistine Vachon and Twentieth Century Fox. "Some of these projects are about Asian-Americans, but I want to see how *BLT* fares," warns Lin. Perhaps Lin needn't be so cautious. After all, tomorrow looks like a promising day for Asian-North American filmmakers.

ABOVE: Stephanie and Ben share a quiet moment.

BETTER LUCK TOMORROW *REVIEW BY ALLAN TONG*

"People like you and me? We don't have to play by the rules. We can make our own."

So says high school valedictorian Daric as he tempts squeaky-clean classmate Ben into a world of crime. These are two of the anti-heroes in Justin Lin's *Better Luck Tomorrow*, a film which breaks the rules of Asian-North American filmmaking and redefines the genre. Well-scripted, sharply directed and finely acted, *BLT* has been called a *post-identity, GenerAsian film* in that it deals exclusively with young, North American-raised Asians and it isn't self-consciously Asian, angry or self-pitying.

BLT follows four friends in a suburban southern California high school, though we see the movie through narrator Ben's eyes. A good Asian boy, Ben (sympathetically played by Parry Shen) studies hard, holds a fast food job and donates his spare time to community service — all calculated to get him into an Ivy League university. To score high on his SATs, Ben endlessly repeats a new word each day until he learns it.

Ben, with his geeky best friend Virgil (a sharp Jason Tobin) and Virgil's cool cousin Han (handsome Sung Kang), engages in petty theft because "there's nothing better to do." Nobody suspects anything as long as he keeps his grades up. Their carefree days end when Daric (a menacing Roger Fan) makes a stink over Ben being the token Asian on the school basketball team. Daric is the head of almost every school club including the "academic decathlon" team, which is really a front for selling cheat sheets to fellow students. Appearances mean everything.

Daric joins the threesome in running ever-growing scams. Money pours in, their popularity soars and girls take notice. However, Ben has a crush on his pretty lab partner, Stephanie (a charismatic Karin Anna Cheung), but she already has a boyfriend in rich, preppy Steve (John Cho). As the parties and drugs take their toll, Ben's grades begin to slip and his life spirals out of control. Ben tells his friends he wants out, but there's one last job.

Director Lin used to teach basketball to inner city kids, and a genuine sense of ennui grips *BLT*. These kids have everything, yet they care for little.

PARAMOUNT PICTURES

Virgil and Han go cruising.

They are casual in their violence. At a house party, Daric pulls a gun on an obnoxious jock while Virgil and Ben kick the guy on the ground. Sex and drugs are free and easy like candy. In a trip to Las Vegas, the four share a hooker after presenting her as a gift to Ben.

Aside from a few teachers (including Jerry Mathers in a cameo), there are no adults in *BLT*. This is a teenager's world, dark and amoral. *BLT* never condemns its delinquent teens, an attitude that will outrage some viewers. Yet, it never sensationalizes them as in Larry Clark's trashy *Kids*. *BLT* could have been made as a black comedy, but that would've been too glib. Instead, Lin and his co-writers take a detached stance as if to say, This is the way these kids are — take them or leave them.

Like an art film, *BLT* contains moments of calm and silence, punctuated by sharp violence and intense conflict. An undercurrent of doom grows as we watch Ben's world slip out of his grasp. We know something Bad will happen. Just what, we don't know until the chilling climax — expertly staged and shot.

At other moments, however, Lin's understated approach is too subdued. The first act of the film drags as *BLT* spends too much time setting up its characters, and not enough in building momentum. We're waiting for something to happen. Conversely, the ending feels unfinished. After the Big Moment, we don't see how the climax changes our anti-heroes, apart from Virgil. The ending comes too abruptly and the film feels like it skipped a beat. However, in this day of Happy Endings, Lin is courageous to deliver an open ending.

PARAMOUNT PICTURES

Though it's marketed to MTV's 18–34 audience (as well as Asian-North Americans), *BLT* avoids bombarding the audience with constant rock music. The soundtrack is varied and exciting, never drawing attention to itself. Cinematographer, Patrice Cochet, captures sunny southern Cal full of grey skies and clouds, the perfect complement to a story of doom and anomie. Director Lin has a firm grip over the visuals, both in the design and editing.

Most remarkable about *BLT* is that its gang of Californian high school kids are never self-consciously Asian. They're just teenagers who happen to be Asian. They're also an unapologetic bunch — beating, shooting, screwing and snorting without contrition — until they shred the Model Minority straightjacket imposed by Hollywood.

Hopefully forever.

(For another take on* Better Luck Tomorrow*, see Picks and Pans, p.43)

ABOVE: Han, Daric, Virgil and Ben doing some male bonding at the pier.

HELP WANTED: Elderly Asian couple seeks dutiful, responsible son or daughter to act as primary caregiver. In this challenging but important role, you will ensure that day-to-day routines are maintained. You will monitor the couple's health, administer medication as prescribed, provide meals, and organize leisure activities.

Applicants must have a nurturing, patient demeanour and be able to multitask, prioritize, problem-solve, and think on their feet. You must be willing to perform duties such as bathing and dressing the couple, and changing soiled sheets and bedpans. Previous experience as a caregiver or nurse is an asset.

The successful candidate will ideally be the first-born son, eldest daughter, or unmarried child; however, applicants with families and children will be considered. Financial stability is desired, as is a home with a sizeable garden.

No compensation will be given for this position.

THE AGE OF RESPONSIBILITY: WHO CARES FOR AGEING PARENTS?

By Marlene Dong

KUAN FOO

Caring for one or more ageing parents can be a thankless job. It is stressful and demanding work that has the potential to wreak emotional and financial havoc. It is not glamorous nor is it suitable for clock-watchers. If a parent isn't healthy, you must provide care on demand regardless the time of day.

According to a Sustainability Report[1] on Canada's ageing population, there were more than four million people over the age of 65 in 2001. By 2016, nearly 5.9 million Canadians, more than 15% of the country's population, are expected to be 65 years or older.

As the baby boomer generation approaches retirement, a crisis scenario seems primed to develop. Overwhelmed by the number of ageing Canadians, social support networks and government pension programs could become ineffectual or obsolete. Changes to the current health care system continue, but there are no guarantees that retirees will be provided for. Canadians are expected to live longer and pay more for their health care, meaning that some could outlast their retirement income. Consequently, family members will play a more significant role as caregivers.

In Asian culture, caring for an ageing parent is not simply a responsibility, it is a filial duty. Very traditional Asian parents simply assume that one of their children, usually the first-born son or daughter, will care for them in their golden years. Alternately, they might look to an unmarried child to be the designated caregiver. Other factors in determining which child is best able to fill the role include gender, geography, ability or desire to nurture and financial stability.

"I wish I had been married with children. Then I wouldn't have been given the responsibility of caring for your grandmother."

Those were my Aunt Bonnie's sentiments when my grandmother passed away in 2001. Starting at the tender age of 26 when the family immigrated to Sydney, Australia from Hong Kong, my aunt had been my grandmother's primary caregiver for nearly 20 years. The duty fell to Aunt Bonnie

because my other aunts were already married with young children and it was impossible for my ailing grandmother to make the arduous 18-hour flight to live with us in Vancouver.

Aunt Bonnie was saddened by my grandmother's death, but she also found herself experiencing other more mixed emotions. On the one hand, she was suddenly free of her biggest responsibility; on the other, she was fearful of how she would function in a world that had continued to evolve during her time as caregiver. Most of all, my aunt oscillated between the resentment and guilt she felt toward her sisters and my grandmother.

Danielle,* a first generation Chinese Canadian and one of four daughters living at home, currently finds the responsibility of caring for her parents resting on her shoulders. However, she believes her parents are continually evaluating each daughter's capacity for elder care:

"I often get the feeling my parents are using PR tactics to decide which of us will make the better caregiver. It's not explicit, but my parents will pitch certain comments and questions and gauge our responses."

Some family members choose to place an ageing, ailing parent in a care facility where medical, emotional and social support is available. However, in most Asian cultures, unless the parent is terminally ill, a care facility is seen as a last resort and a waste of money. If there is an able body in the family to act as caregiver, most family members opt to provide informal home care.

This isn't always the best option. Ben's grandmother was sent to a seniors' care facility two years ago. She was in good health, but her mobility was severely restricted.

The first time Ben visited his grandmother, she begged for him to take her home. She was lonely, frightened and said again and again that she didn't belong there. Ben knew his grandmother was relatively healthy and it upset him to learn that most of her days were spent in the corridors of the care facility surrounded by elderly citizens in various states of incapacity. Some were slouched in their wheelchairs oblivious to everything around them. Others had soiled their gowns, but the nurses were too busy to tend to them right away.

It bespoke a solitary, monotonous existence and Ben left the care home sad and disgusted. Ben wasn't so angry at the care facility as he was with his parents and nine aunts and uncles. Ben's grandmother had borne and raised ten children and each was considerably well off. It sickened Ben to know that not one of them was willing to assume responsibility for his grandmother.

Ben continues to visit his grandmother, though she no longer cries to be taken home. Age and likely the emotional toll of living in an inappropriate care home have claimed her facilities and she is no longer lucid or communicative.

It's my hope that by the time my parents retire, there will be affordable housing communities built specifically for seniors who crave some degree of independence. I also hope the Federal and Provincial Governments make better provisions for seniors and their caregivers. In June of 2002, the B.C. Provincial Government instituted a new policy[2] that would see family members qua caregivers receiving public funds. It's a small stipend, but it's a start.

Talking about one's demise is understandably a taboo subject, but I know my parents are already considering who will be their primary caregiver. More PR tactics and informal interviews are likely, but I'm sure the job of caring for my parents will ultimately be mine. As far as I'm concerned, it's the most important job in the world.

* *Some names have been changed.*

1 Source: http://www.sustreport.org/signals/canpop_age.html#table

2 Source: Payment to Family Members Policy (B.C. only) http://www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/hcc/index.html

IN 1992, VIDEO FOOTAGE OF THE VANCOUVER EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM BEATING AN UNARMED CHINESE IMMIGRANT RAISED DISTURBING QUESTIONS ABOUT THE POLICE'S TREATMENT OF MINORITY GROUPS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA AND CONTRIBUTED TO THE FORMATION OF AN INDEPENDENT POLICE COMPLAINTS COMMISSION. 10 YEARS LATER, VIDEO EVIDENCE BROUGHT FORWARD IN THE INVESTIGATION INTO THE DEATH OF A FIRST NATIONS MAN IN CUSTODY SEEMS TO INDICATE THAT NOT MUCH HAS CHANGED.

POLICE, BIAS AND VIDEOTAPE

BY LEONARD CLER-CUNNINGHAM AND JASON LEE

On April 29, 1992, North America watched as a 'not guilty' verdict was returned in the trial of four white police officers who had been caught on videotape beating black motorist Rodney King. The six days of rioting in Los Angeles that followed left 54 people, mostly black, dead, over 400 people injured and property damage costs that exceeded $1 billion US. Downtown Toronto was shut down as black and white youths attending an antiracism rally rampaged through the city centre, eluding hundreds of police officers trying vainly to contain them. Montreal's black communities' reacted to the verdict, their outrage further fueled by recent allegations of police racism in the shooting deaths of blacks in Quebec. In Vancouver, however, there was little sustained interest or outrage over the trial's outcome. This was curious considering that an incident strikingly similar to the Rodney King beating had occurred earlier that year.

On the afternoon of Sunday, February 9, 1992, Feng Hua Zhang was watching television in the Vancouver apartment he shared with Wai Shuen Wong, a young visa student from Hong Kong, when he was alerted to the sound of footsteps and men talking outside. A recent refugee claimant from China, Zhang often left the back door of the basement apartment open to let the cat in and out. He was shocked to discover a man with a rifle and mask standing at the door. Convinced it was a robbery, he ran to his bedroom and hid in the closet for 10 minutes as a group of armed men tore apart his home.

In his statement to police Zhang wrote:

...A GUN WAS POINTED AT ME. I IMMEDIATELY PUT UP MY HANDS. ONE OF THE MEN GRABBED MY HAIR AND DRAGGED ME OUT OF THE ROOM. I FELT SOMEONE PUNCH ME HEAVILY ON MY FACE. I WAS DAZED, DRAGGED ALONG THE FLOOR AND TAKEN OUT TO THE STREET. THE MEN HELD ME DOWN ON THE GROUND ON MY STOMACH, AND I FELT MY ARMS WERE TWISTED TO THE BACK AND HANDCUFFS BEING PUT ON ME. SOMEONE SPRAYED SOMETHING ONTO MY FACE. I DON'T KNOW WHAT, BUT I FELT MY FACE AND EYES WERE ON FIRE. I WAS ALSO PUNCHED AND KICKED ... I HEAR [MY ROOMMATE'S] VOICE. HE ASKED ME IF HE WERE DREAMING THIS; I ANSWERED HIM NO. I SAID THIS IS ALL REAL. THEN SOMEONE SHOUTED AT US TO STOP OUR TALKING. AFTER THAT, WE DARED NOT SPEAK."

"I WAS VERY AFRAID, HOPING THE POLICE WOULD COME TO RESCUE ME."

Unfortunately for Zhang, the police were already there. The men delivering the blows, as he lay handcuffed in the alley, were members of the Vancouver Police Department's Emergency Response Team (ERT). The subsequent internal investigation by the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) revealed that the ERT had the wrong apartment. The incident would have gone completely unnoticed except that a neighbour had caught the entire botched raid on videotape. Unlike the King beating, the Zhang and Wong video provoked little immediate reaction despite the local and national news being filled with images of the police delivering kicks and punches to a prone Zhang.

"At first, no Chinese organisations were willing to help Mr. Zhang and Mr. Wong — none," says Victor Wong, the executive director of the Vancouver Association of Chinese Canadians, a human rights advocacy group. He isn't surprised that the men were left to fend for themselves. "There was, and remains today, a fear of confronting the police. Organizations and groups will never be enthusiastic about supporting members of the community that allege brutality or use of force." Zhang and Wong filed a complaint against the police. The internal VPD and Crown Counsel investigation ruled that nothing had been done wrong. The two men were forced to sue the City of Vancouver and ultimately received an out-of-court financial settlement.

Leading up to the Zhang and Wong beating, there had been growing suspicion and unease in B.C. regarding police use of force, particularly against minorities. From 1988 to 1992, B.C. police officers had shot 14 people — 10 of them fatally. Allegations of

abuse by the RCMP against First Nations residents in northern B.C. were so serious that then-Attorney General Colin Gabelmann had ordered an independent inquiry. A month after the Zhang and Wong video was broadcast, Vancouver police shot and killed Frank Bell, an unarmed, 21-year-old First Nations man, having mistaken the Walkman he was holding for a gun. And then in April came the Rodney King decision and the resulting backlash. Hayne Wai is a longtime community activist and author of a jargon-free history of Vancouver City hall's planned destruction of Chinatown in the '60s and '70s — a work that should be mandatory reading for anyone interested in the story of Chinese-Canadians during that period. Reflecting on what he's observed over the years, he returns time and time again to the theme of how race has been a determining factor in how individuals interact with Canadian society- how, as he puts it, "Your colour precedes you." When asked what finally motivated the Attorney General to investigate the police's methods, the soft-spoken Wai is uncharacteristically blunt: "They shot a white kid."

On May 12, 1992, West Vancouver police officers conducted a drug raid on a North Vancouver basement suite. One of the suite's occupants, 22-year-old Daniel Possee, the son of former Vancouver Whitecaps soccer star Derek Possee, happened to be holding a pellet gun in his hand and was fatally shot. The police had been looking for Possee's sister and her boyfriend who had moved out of the suite two days earlier. The reported 100 grams of marijuana found was later downgraded to 15. Due to a variety of factors, not least of which was the senior Possee's celebrity, the Daniel Possee story received far more coverage than any of the previous incidents of police brutality involving First Nations or visible minority victims. The resulting outcry may have been what finally spurred the Attorney General's office in June 1992 to appoint Provincial Supreme Court Justice Wallace Oppal to head an independent inquiry into municipal policing. The Oppal Commission, as it came to be called, was not mandated to review any specific incidents or complaints but little else was left unexamined. In its two-year lifespan, the Oppal Commission explored and made recommendations on governance, communitybased policing, regionalization, human resources, non-police personnel, private security, Aboriginal policing, high-risk policing and the role of the RCMP. The resulting report, Closing the Gap: Policing and theCommunity, has been called the Holy Grail of policing. The report's strongest recommendation was for the establishment of an independent police complaints commission vested with the authority to order independent investigations into allegations of police misconduct and brutality.

On July 1, 1998, the B.C. Government created the Office of the Police Complaints Commissioner and appointed Don Morrison, as the first commissioner. Almost four years later, Morrison would resign from the office under a cloud of controversy, the result of allegations brought forward to the Provincial Special Committee to Review the Police Complaints Process. During what was supposed to be a routine review of the Commission's activities, the testimony brought before the Special Committee makes it clear that, after a decade and millions of dollars, what was created to restore the public's confidence in the police and justice system has had the opposite effect. And once again, videotape plays a central role.

On December 5, 1998, Frank Paul, a Mi'kmaq man from the Big Cove Reserve in New Brunswick, was found lying unconscious on a downtown eastside street by officers of

the VPD and taken to the city jail. Later that night, another officer left him in an alley behind a detox. He was found there early the next morning, dead of hypothermia. According to police records, the same officers who took Frank Paul into the city jail were the ones to find him dead the next day. Their records state that they had:

APPROACHED THE MALE, WHO WAS INTOXICATED AND LYING ON HIS BACK. THE MALE IDENTIFIED HIMSELF AS FRANK PAUL BUT WAS UNABLE TO ANSWER ANY OTHER QUESTIONS. MR. PAUL'S SPEECH WAS SLURRED AND INCOHERENT. HE SMELLED OF WHAT THE UNDERSIGNED BELIEVED TO BE RICE WINE. PAUL WAS UNABLE TO SIT UP OR WALK. GIVEN HIS APPARENT INABILITY TO CARE FOR HIMSELF, PAUL WAS ARRESTED. A POLICE WAGON WAS CALLED TO PICK HIM UP. PAUL HAD TO BE CARRIED TO THE WAGON, AS HE WAS UNABLE TO GET THERE ON HIS OWN. THE WAGON LEFT WITH PAUL. AT APPROXIMATELY 0250 HOURS WE WERE DISPATCHED TO A SUDDEN DEATH IN THE REAR OF 336 1ST AVENUE. UPON ARRIVAL, THE UNDERSIGNED RECOGNIZED THE DECEASED AS FRANK PAUL.

The Vancouver homicide unit's initial investigation was sent to Vancouver Crown Counsel and the Internal Investigation's section. According to testimony at the Special Committee, the city jail sergeant told VPD internal investigators that he didn't believe that Paul was drunk. He also allegedly stated that not only was Paul able to walk, talk and care for himself, but he even held a conversation with Paul in the elevator. He decided to have Paul "breached" and ordered another officer to take him to a park near Commercial Drive. Testimony at the Special Committee states that the paddy wagon driver told internal investigators that he took Paul to a local detox that was full, and that Paul was mobile and able to dress himself when the officer laid him against a wall in the alley behind the detox. Crown Counsel saw no reason to proceed with charges. The jail sergeant was given a two-day suspension and the driver of the

paddy wagon received a one-day suspension.

Despite the findings of the Crown, the circumstances of Paul's death raised a red flag with the Complaints Commission. The practice of "breaching" someone in custody, usually native, was already in front of the courts in Saskatchewan, where two police officers had been charged and eventually convicted for dumping an aboriginal man outside the city limits in below-freezing weather. Bill MacDonald, the Commission's senior investigator, examined the circumstances around Paul's death and quickly concluded that there were troubling discrepancies and contradictions in the statements of the paddy wagon driver and the jail sergeant. MacDonald, along with Deputy Commissioner Mathew Adie and senior legal advisor Dana Urban went to Morrison and got permission for Dr. Rex Ferris, a world renowned forensic pathologist, to look at the file and give his opinion as to cause of death. Dr. Ferris concluded that the Vancouver police had not told the truth about what happened that night. However, an even more critical, and damning, piece of evidence was about to come forward.

So far, all investigations had been relying entirely on still photographs from several cameras at the city jail. According to Urban's testimony at the inquiry, MacDonald "took the videos to the RCMP forensic crime lab, and their experts put together all the different cameras that show different areas in real time." The still photos upon which the independent forensic pathologist had based his conclusion were now assembled into a "movie" — and what it revealed would rip the Commission apart.

Urban testified that the video:

GRAPHICALLY SHOWS THE PADDY WAGON COMING IN AND MR. PAUL BEING TAKEN OUT OF THE PADDY WAGON, RIGHT ONTO THE CEMENT, SPREAD-EAGLED, WITH HIS HANDS BACK, AND BEING DRAGGED, LIKE A SACK OF GARBAGE OR A CARCASS, ALL THE WAY DOWN THE HALLWAY TO THE ELEVATOR, LEAVING A CLEAR, DEFINITE, DISTINCT, UNMISTAKABLE WET MARK FAR BETTER THAN A JANITOR COULD DO OVER THAT AREA. NOWHERE TO THAT ELEVATOR DOES MR. PAUL MOVE — NOT A BLINK OF AN EYE, NOT A FINGER, NOTHING. THE BUTTON IS PRESSED. HE'S TAKEN UP THE ELEVATOR — THE SAME. THE DOOR OPENS TO THE SERGEANT'S BOOKING-IN AREA, AND WHAT DO YOU SEE? THEY DON'T EVEN TAKE HIM OUT OF THAT ELEVATOR. HE DOESN'T MOVE IN THAT ELEVATOR. THE SERGEANT GOES IN BRIEFLY. I DON'T KNOW WHEN THIS CONVERSATION TOOK PLACE OR HOW HE COULD HAVE ASSESSED AN INERT OBJECT — AND THERE'S CERTAINLY NO MOVEMENT, EVEN IF HE WAS ALIVE AT THAT POINT IN TIME.

He goes on to testify that:

WE HAVE A MAN WHO DIDN'T MAKE A MOVEMENT, WHOSE CLOTHES WERE SOAKING WET, BEING DUMPED IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE IN TWO DEGREES CELSIUS WEATHER. THE POWER OF THE VIDEO IS A CORROBORATION OF WHAT DR. FERRIS SAID, BOTH ABOUT THE MEDICAL CONDITION AND ABOUT HIS VIEW AS TO WHETHER OR NOT IT WAS PHYSICALLY POSSIBLE FOR MR. PAUL TO HAVE DONE WHAT THOSE POLICEMEN SAID HE DID.

More troubling allegations about VPD behaviour came out at the hearing. MacDonald had contacted the Big Cove Indian band in New Brunswick only to be told that not only had the department not informed the band that Paul had died while in police custody, but they had also told them Paul had died as a result of a hit-and-run accident. After MacDonald presented his report to Morrison, he, Adie and Urban jointly recommended that a public hearing into the circumstances surrounding Paul's death be held immediately. Commissioner Morrison tried unsuccessfully to get another organization to take on the Frank Paul case. Even though mandated by law to hold a public inquiry into any deaths in custody, the Coroner's Office twice refused requests to look into Paul's death arguing that, based upon evidence supplied to them by the VPD, Paul did not die in custody. The Solicitor General's office also refused to order the matter re-opened. Frank Paul had become a political liability that no one wanted to touch. The Police Commissioner, the Solicitor General, Crown Counsel and the Coroner's Office all simply wanted the story to go away.

The Office of the Police Complaints Commissioner officially closed the Frank Paul file on January 15, 2002. After several in-camera meetings, Don Morrison tendered his resignation on May 27, and reportedly received a $100,000 severance package. Dana Urban had quit his job in disgust the year before. In his testimony to the Special Committee, Urban admitted he had entered the job with high expectations of accomplishing a lot of good but he had failed miserably: "I'm ashamed to have my name linked, in any way, to that of the Commission. I'm so ashamed that I have not yet had the courage to add to my c.v. that I was there at all."

In early 2002, another videotape came out of Los Angeles. This one showed a white police officer slamming a handcuffed, black teenager against a car and delivering a well-aimed punch to the boy's head. Reaction was swift; the officer's actions were quickly denounced and the FBI and Los Angeles County District Attorney's office immediately announced investigations. It seems that south of the border they've learned something from the Rodney King riots.

In Vancouver on August 10, 2002, British Columbia's Provincial Special Committee to Review the Police Complaints Process released their first report.

There is no mention made of Frank Paul.

POSTSCRIPT

A version of this article first appeared in the February 2, 2003 edition of the Vancouver Courier following allegations that six Vancouver police officers took three suspected drug dealers to Stanley Park and beat them. All six have since been charged. The Vancouver Chief of Police Jamie Graham was quick to denounce the article: "reporting this story amid distortions and selective facts concerning previous incidents should also offend anyone expecting fair and impartial journalism."

In a letter to the paper, he also wrote, "We need public support to properly serve that same public. Attacks designed to unfairly undermine public confidence in the police do a disservice to us all."

No mention of Frank Paul was made anywhere in the letter and in the following week the previous police spokesperson returned to the communications department to assist the police in getting positive stories out to the public.

LEONARD CLER-CUNNINGHAM is an independent researcher and freelance writer. An upcoming article, on research ethics in Canada is coming out in *Vancouver Magazine*. *Justice, Lies and Videotape* was the cover story in a recent *Vancouver Courier* and can be viewed at **http://vancourier.com/021103/news/021103nn1.html**. He's returned to Vancouver to complete the follow-up study to his earlier research, *Violence Against Women in Vancouver's Street Level Sex Trade and the Police Response*. His work has been featured on the CBC's *Fifth Estate* and played a prominent role in PIVOT's *To Serve and Protect: A Report on Policing in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside*. An ethnographic project working with injection drug users on the establishment of a safe injection site is part of Netty Wildes' film *Fix*. A single parent, he is also shooting his first documentary. (Leonard Cler-Cunningham can be contacted at aji@axion.net)

JASON LEE has been active in the human rights field for many years. *Police, Bias and Videotape* marks his first foray into journalism and is the first part of a series he's doing with Leonard Cler-Cunningham that looks at the state of human rights on the ground in Vancouver and the Pacific Northwest. "I started writing as an alternative to the barriers, self-imposed and otherwise, faced by non-profits." He would like to thank 'Griff' for the endless supply of inspiration and baby goobers.

TO SUE OR NOT TO SUE: THE COST OF AN INEFFECTIVE COMPLAINTS SYSTEM

"Unfortunately with the system that we have now, I think that the options are either to forget it or to sue," observes lawyer and community activist, Tommy Tao. "To try to go through filing a complaint ... I see too much frustration, too much effort, to go through all the hoops to get nothing in the end, it's just a big waste of time." Victor Wong shares similar views. "The police will always defend themselves and their members no matter what. The police will always describe themselves as wearing the white hat in an incident ... It's obvious that the Police Complaints Commission is ineffective. The civil litigation route is the best one." Even Justice Wallace Oppal is concerned about potential cost of litigation arising from the police's resistance to civilian oversight. "In any democracy the police must be responsible to civilian authority. If the police are not responsible to civilian authority, we become a police state," he says. "One of the problems we've had is that governments have failed to hold police accountable. We've seen it over and over again where the police do what they want ... and where there is weak civilian oversight there is going to be millions paid out in damages." Tao believes that if the police want to avoid costly lawsuits, somebody has to say they're sorry. While he notes that the police may think that any apology is an admission of guilt that can leave them open to lawsuits, he notes that even lawyers tell their clients when they make mistakes, and finds that those clients do not pursue civil suits against them. Paul Monty, Quebec Police Ethics Commissioner, presented a conciliatory model to the Special Committee to Review the Police Complaint Process. Under the Quebec model, 80 to 85% of cases sent to conciliation are resolved. In 2001, the City of Vancouver paid over $470,000 in lawsuits. $410,000 was paid out in out-of-court settlements.

CHINESE FOOD FOR THOUGHT
by Jaclyn Law

In a show of solidarity with Chinese restaurant workers (and to satisfy our erstwhile MSG cravings), my husband and I went to Goldstone Noodle on Spadina Ave. in Toronto for dinner last night. SARS-related paranoia has pretty much emptied out the usually bustling Chinatown. There are no lineups anywhere and — get this — you can actually park on Spadina. Some Chinese establishments are reporting a 90% loss of business. So, Jacob and I decided to do our part and drown ourselves in a big bowl of barbecue duck congee.

I've never had a lousy meal in Chinatown, but my standards are admittedly lax and I'm easy to please. Recently, in the *National Post*, food critic Jacob Richler made an interesting point: if Toronto's Chinese restaurants were better, they would probably be weathering this "storm from Guangdong" with more success. At first, I felt indignant — how dare he say that all of Toronto's Chinese restaurants are mediocre (or, as he put it, "predictably OK"). But then I thought, "Hmm. Maybe he's on to something."

In his review of three popular (well, pre-SARS, anyway) Chinese restaurants in Toronto, he cited the lousy English skills of the waiters (apparently it took him two or three tries to order more beer) and the hit-and-miss food (deep-fried chicken was fab, but a pricey lobster was inedible). Richler was getting all riled up at the lack of response to his complaints, but his wife pacified him by saying, "Oh, Jake, it's Chinatown."

And that's the comment that got me thinking.

Should poor service, disappointing dishes and disgusting washrooms (I added the last one) be dismissed as just being part of the

SOMEHOW I ALWAYS FORGAVE THESE THINGS OUT OF SOME VAGUE SENSE OF LOYALTY TO THE CHINESE COMMUNITY...

Chinatown experience? Part of me (the part that grew up eating shrimp dumplings all over this city) says, "What's your point?" and another part of me says, "Hell, no! Why should there be a different standard for Chinese restaurants?"

I've encountered my share of surly store clerks, poker-faced unilingual waitresses and supermarkets with questionable standards of sanitation in both of Toronto's Chinatowns and further afield in North York, Markham and Richmond Hill. At restaurant washrooms, I think I spend more time plotting escape routes that minimize the amount of contact my fingers make with door handles and taps than actually peeing. But somehow I always forgave these things out of some vague sense of loyalty to the Chinese community (despite the fact that, like Richler, I always order my food in English). That and the fact that stuff at Chinese merchants' is just so much cheaper than at Loblaws. But maybe you get what you pay for.

I also thought, "Well, that's just how business is done in Hong Kong — it's a cultural thing," much the same way I shrug when people in Chinese restaurants (when there still were some) and on the Spadina streetcar talk too loudly, because I was once told that's what you have to do to be heard where they come from. But rudeness is not a cultural trait — it's just a complete disregard for everybody around you. That's not a Chinese thing, and now I feel slightly ashamed that I believed it acceptable to think that it was.

I read the "How to recreate the dim sum experience at home" page in the spring issue of *bambooda* and nearly died laughing. Yep, urine on the floor, Christmas decorations year-round, check, check, check — it was a hilarious send-up. But reading it now, in the middle of the SARS crisis when at least one buffet chain has taken out full-page ads in the newspaper declaring their wait staff SARS-free and practically begging customers to visit, I can't help but think that urine on the floor in an Italian restaurant would be considered appalling, not de rigueur.

It's easy for people to give something up if they aren't given enough reasons to make the effort to keep doing it. There are hundreds of restaurants in Toronto, and it's easy to try that new Greek place or order a pizza when the dining experience at Chinese restaurants doesn't inspire loyalty.

That said, I will keep ordering the giant tub of *Super Supreme Congee* at Congee Wong when the desire hits. I just won't be surprised anymore when all the tables around me are empty.

JACLYN LAW is the editor of *Jasmine Magazine* (www.jasminemagazine.com)

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THE *BAMBOODA* GUIDE TO CHINESE BUNS

By Dennis Chui photos by Kuan Foo

Here's a small selection of what's available at your neighborhood Chinese bakery.

BBQ PORK BUN

cha-seew-bao

The king of Chinese buns, filled with minced barbecue pork and mysterious gravy.

COCKTAIL BUN

guy-may-bao

The queen of Chinese buns, shaped like a hot dog bun, and filled with a sweet coconut paste.

COCONUT TART

yeah-see-tat

Similar to the Cocktail Bun, except in tart form. For those who *really* love coconut.

CURRY BEEF BUN

ga-lay-ngow-yook-bao

Filled with beef 'n onions in curry... How can you go wrong?

CURRY BEEF PUFF

ga-lay-ngow-yook-gok

Like the bun, except in a flaky pastry. Has a tendency to crumble so make sure you have a plate.

HOT DOG BUN

yeet-gow-bao

The ultimate fusion of trailer-trash food and Chinese ingenuity.

CRISPY TWIST

mah-jei

This Chinese take on rice crispy squares is sticky, gooey goodness.

SAVE THAT STRING!

In a tradition passed down through generations, it is customary to keep the string or twine used to wrap up Chinese bakery boxes. It is useful for tying together broken lawn furniture, fastening gardening stakes, and filling up unused space in empty ice cream buckets.

BUY 6!
In another tradition passed down through generations, people can save on the Goods and Services Tax (GST) if they buy their baked goods in quantities of 6 or more. ***(In Canada only)***

CURRY CHICKEN BUN

ga-lay-guy-bao

Good for when you want chicken curry, but are too lazy to use utensils.

EGG TART

dahn-taht

Delicious egg custard in a flaky pastry shell. A popular childhood favourite. Be careful not to bite into the foil...ouch!

HAM & EGG BUN

faw-toi-dahn-bao

Anything you can stick in a bun, they do!

PINEAPPLE TARO BUN

woo-tow-bao

Acutally NOT made of pineapple. It gets its name from how the sweet paste on top of the bun looks when it's cooked. Nice dollop of taro paste inside.

MEAT ROLL

yook-gyoon

The Chinese sausage roll, filled with savoury ground meat.

RED BEAN BUN

hoong-dow-bao

Stubby starfish-shaped bun filled with sweet red bean paste.

COCONUT SNOW BALL

naw-mei-chee

A sloppy-good kind of eat. Gelatinous ball covered with shredded coconut, filled with sugar, crushed peanuts, sesame seeds and more coconut.

Baked goods courtesy of King Wah Bakery, Vancouver

GO FIGURE: TIPS ON BUYING COLLECTABLE ACTION FIGURES

By Ronnie M. Fuentes

Thinking of buying your first collectable action figure, but don't know how and where to begin? Well, you're in luck. Summer is one of the best times to embark on this pastime because, after showing off their new and exciting series of collectibles in international toy fairs during winter and spring, it's time now for toy companies to ship and sell them to hobby shops around the world.

However, you just don't grab the first cool action figure you see in the aisle. There are some basics to follow. Observe these guidelines and you get more bang for your buck in choosing your first collectable.

1. Packaging. Action figures come in a variety of packages, from the regular carded blister packs like Hasbro's *Star Wars* line (**starwars.hasbro.com**) to gatefolded window boxes such as Toynami's Robotech Masterpiece Collection (**www.toynami.com**).

There are two reasons why you should inspect the packaging. First, if you prefer to display your collection in its original packaging, you should watch out for damages such as card-surface tears, creases, curled corners and dented, dinged or cracked bubbles (the plastic covering). As much as possible, try to get a package that's mint or near mint in condition (little or no damage).

Second, you should check for missing parts and accessories or concealed damages in the product itself. From the package, you can examine the sculpt, paint, articulation and accessories.

2. Sculpting. Forty years ago, action figures looked like poseable Oscar statuettes, but thanks to radical sculptors and model makers from companies like McFarlane Toys (**www.spawn.com**), action figures have become works of art.

When checking the sculpt, you should study the product's design, concept and detailing. But always keep a keen eye on the details. They should be faithfully reproduced, especially if the toy is based on a movie or cartoon character. A perfect example of awesome detailing is Kaiyodo's Monev The Gale from the anime, *Trigun The Planet Gunsmoke* (**www.kaiyodo.co.jp**).

3. Painting. By adding an illusion of depth and dimension, a good paint job breathes life to the toy. With the right amount of colours and proper use of painting techniques like washing, dry brushing and weathering, highlights are emphasized and recesses deepened.

But if the painting is sloppy, then the figure's quality suffers no matter how meticulously detailed it is. Just stroll along the action-figure aisle of your neighbourhood Toys "R" Us and you'll find several examples of these shoddily painted items posing as warming the pegs.

4. Articulation. The heart of action figures (even

Mind if I butt in?

BLUE BOX TOYS

According to ToyFare's July 2002 issue, below is the only list you'll need to come up with a cool collection of action figures. That is, if you're a huge *Star Wars* fan. (Otherwise, just stick to the previous article if you're not.)

1. Clone Trooper
2. Royal Guard
3. Snowspeeder (Wal-Mart exclusive)
4. TIE Bomber (Wal-Mart exclusive)
5. Darth Tyranus (Deluxe)
6. Padmé Amidala (Arena Escape)
7. Jango Fett (Kamino Escape)
8. Zam Wesell
9. Kit Fisto
10. Luminara Unduli

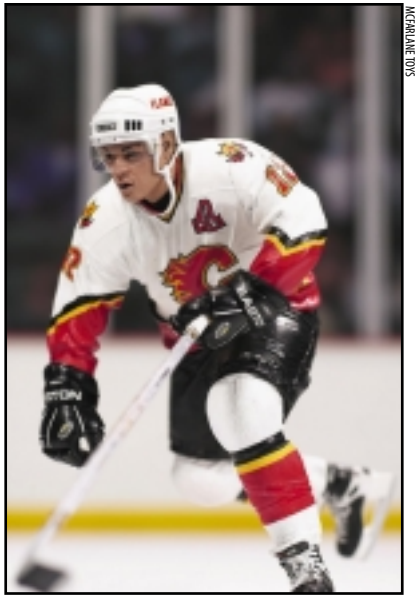
though it's located in the joints). Articulation is the number of movable parts that make the toy poseable. The number and location of articulation varies from figure to figure. It used to be only the 12-inchers like bbi's (**www.blueboxtoys.com**) that possessed a significant number of articulation points (over 30+). Now, even the six-inchers do, like Toy Biz' Super Poseable Spider-Man (**www.toybiz.com**).

5. Accessories. What's a bad-ass action figure without a truckload of extras? Accessories range from optional heads and limbs to a variety of weapons, clothing and equipment. Dragon's 12-inch military line (**www.dragon-models.com**) comes with tons of trimmings. Some, like the *Appleseed* action figures (**www.toycom.net**), even come with a free DVD.

There's also the playability factor or play value (a luxury that box collectors can't afford, unless they open the packaging). Let's not lose sight of the fact that action figures are toys and are meant to be played with.

Of course, you can screw all these rules and follow your instincts instead. So, if you think the action figure looks goods on top of your computer monitor, then, by all means, buy it!

RONNIE M. FUENTES will not let his son play with his action figures.



TOP: Jarome Iginla in all his sculptured glory.
BOTTOM: Roy Fokker in snazzy window-box.

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PICKS AND PANS

REVIEWS BY TERRY CHAN, KUAN FOO, CHRISTINE MIGUEL, ALLAN TONG, FRANCIS "SANFRANDISCO" YEE LOY

MOVIES: IN THEATRES

Hero (2002)

Starring: Jet Li, Maggie Cheung, Tony Leung Chiu Wai, Zhang Ziyi, Donnie Yen
Director: Zhang Yimou
Country: Hong Kong / China

With a cast led by international superstars Jet Li, Zhang Ziyi, Tony Leung and Maggie Cheung, acclaimed director Zhang Yimou's Hero promises to put Chinese movies on the map. Casual moviegoers might expect the sword fights featured in this martial arts epic to surpass those gravity-defying stunts in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. However, kung-fu buffs will be disappointed that the niftiest action scene is not a one-on-one rooftop battle, but two swordsmen fending off swarms of archery attacks with only the potency of their sword work and flailing sleeves. It's a scene that fittingly summarizes the movie: individually brilliant and beautiful sequences awkwardly put together into a standard plot with logic that works like the gravity of ancient China (that is to say, somewhat selectively).

This is vintage Zhang Yimou, where stories are not told by dialogue, but unravelled through cinematography filmed with painstaking detail. Spoken narrative is simplistic throughout the film, but the rich colours and expressive textures more than competently deliver a thousand words. The carefully choreographed fight scenes are sufficiently thrilling, but this dimension of the movie simply serves as a vehicle to achieve the director's artistic vision.

The story is set in the Warring States period around 200 BC when China was still partitioned into seven rival feudal states ruled by warlords. The state of Qin, with tyrant King Qin (played by veteran actor Chen Daoming) at the helm, enjoys hegemony with its feared cavalry. After countless assassination attempts, including a close call orchestrated by lovers Broken Sword (Leung) and Flying Snow (Cheung), the spooked King

TOP: Zhang Ziyi...'nuff said! BOTTOM: Jet Li and Maggie Cheung face off...but in the wrong direction.

Qin is forced into reclusive paranoia. Imagine his delight when an unknown warrior, appropriately named Nameless (Li), presents the fabled king with swords he captured from Broken Sword and Flying Snow.

As a reward for his unprecedented heroics, Nameless is granted the opportunity to rehash his feat to King Qin. The romantic visionary Broken Sword and vindictive Flying Snow are both sword masters, but their differences keep them in perpetual marital bickering. The chasm between them is further widened by the scandalous affair Flying Snow had with spearman Sky (*Iron Monkey's* Donnie Yen), a little-known fact that the steely Nameless exploits to seal their demises. Driven by her teenager sexual curiosity, Broken Sword's smitten maid Moon (Zhang) also desperately vies for her master's affection.

The ever-leery Qin keeps pushing Nameless for the truth and variations of the story start to emerge. Director Zhang chooses to render each version in a different colour scheme to reflect its dominant emotion: shades of fiery red to signify boisterous rage and jealousy, layers of blue to tell a beautiful love story, hues of green that paint noble courage and valour. The Qin army, a lurking, background presence clad completely in black armour, instills a deathly undertone to all the episodes.

The disparate stories of the movie, though individually brilliant as fantasy tales, ultimately fail to cohere into a compelling overall story. Cheung, Leung and Li never have a chance to fully develop their respective characters as the cluttered plot segues from one sequence to another. Also the film's grounding in historical fact (King Qin, who later becomes the First Emperor of China, was arguably the most significant figure in Chinese history) severely stifles the romantic elasticity of the more fantastic elements. Perhaps sensing this, the director decides to adhere to his vision of story telling and avoid a historically authentic approach, which inevitably leaves the plot a bit less than convincing.

With all its flaws, *Hero* is still a superbly made film with breathtaking cinematography. Mainstream kung fu film viewers looking for a "better *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*" will be disappointed to find a movie that skirts inaccessible pretentiousness, but other moviegoers will find a beautifully made blockbuster stamped with Zhang Yimou's signature style of subdued elegance. – TC

MIRAMAX FILMS

Tony Leung prepares to kick some ass.

Better Luck Tomorrow (2002)

Starring: Parry Shen, Roger Fan, Jason J. Tobin, Sung Kang, Karin Anna Cheung and John Cho
Director: Justin Lin
Country: USA

The title sounds like an odd blend of *Joy Luck Club* and John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow* and in truth, director Justin Lin's first solo feature, *Better Luck Tomorrow*, has a little bit in common with both those films. Like *Joy Luck Club*, *BLT* is an Asian-American ensemble piece told through the eyes of the main protagonist, and like Woo's classic actioneer, *BLT* is stylish and violent. However, the similarities end there. *BLT* is light years away from the puerile, "exotic" view of Asian-America offered by Amy Tan and her ilk. And unlike the "honourable" gangsters in Woo's ballistic morality plays, the protagonists of *BLT* are not so much good or evil as shockingly amoral.

Ben Manibag (Shen) is a 16-year-old high school student and a classic overachiever. When he is not studying or racking up yet another "employee of the month" award at the local fast food joint, he is filling his days with such résumé-padding activities as sports and volunteer work at the hospital. But Ben has a dark side as well. He, fellow nerd Virgil Hu (Tobin) and Virgil's stoic cousin Han (Kang) like to commit petty crimes such as stealing and fencing computer equipment. There appears to be no purpose to these felonies (Ben keeps the money he earns in a box under his bed but never seems to spend it) other than boredom and the thrill of transgression. Enter Daric Loo (Fan). Like Ben, Daric is a brilliant overachiever — he is the senior valedictorian and president of seemingly all the school clubs. He is also self-centred, manipulative and, as it transpires, very dangerous. Under Daric's leadership, the boys are seduced into a descending spiral of crime, drugs and violence that will threaten their lives and their futures.

Right from the start, it is clear that this is an Asian-AMERICAN film. The characters may be of Asian descent but there is very little Asian about them. None of them appears to speak an Asian language (although Ben speaks Spanish in one scene, consistent with his Filipino heritage) and their clothes and attitudes reflect a white, or in Virgil's case, black, American sensibility. In some ways, this story could have been told about characters of any race. That it is told about Asian-Americans adds a whole layer of nuances, not least of which is the shattering of the Model Minority myth. This in itself makes *BLT* an important film. But is it a good one? The answer is much like the

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movie itself: complicated and shaded with grey. This is a work that demands a reaction from its audience and what your response will be, depends very much on your pre-conceptions going in. Some will be put off by the amorality of the story. Others will be energized by the honest portrayal of Asian-Americans as individuals rather than stereotypes. Still others, like myself, will find themselves somewhere in the middle.

First, make no mistake; Justin Lin knows his stuff. The direction is tight and confident; the numerous editing tricks — jagged cuts, slow motion and sped-up sequences, freeze frames — are generally well-integrated and do not detract from the storytelling. The script balances its unflinching look at violence and corruption with moments of genuine humour. The performances are uniformly strong and the actors are allowed space to develop their characters. However, in spite of its merits, *BLT* is a much easier film to admire than to actually like. Watching it is a bit like wading into the ocean: it seems warm and inviting on the surface, but the deeper you go the more you are seized by a penetrating coldness.

This effect is partially a result of the near complete absence of parents or any kind of authority figure at all. It is not that the boys live alone — the point is made that only Daric has a whole house to himself — parents simply do not factor into their lives to any major degree. In fact, when one of the boys is seriously injured, there are no parents at the hospital. Eliminating the parents eliminates the clichéd generational conflict that features in much Asian-American film and literature (see *Joy Luck Club*, ad nauseam). However, it also eliminates a significant source of external pressure that might be pushing the boys to achieve or misbehave. Hints of other motivations are there, most notably in Daric, who violently overreacts to perceived slights to his class or race, and in Virgil, who has the fractured volatility of someone who has been bullied to the breaking point. But for the most part, the audience is not given much insight into what drives the boys. As such, it is hard to feel either shock or sympathy as they face the consequences (or lack of consequences) flowing from their conduct.

Particularly baffling is Ben. Unlike Daric and Virgil, who at least appear to be exorcising personal demons, and the increasingly uneasy Han, who is not as sharp or ambitious as the others, Ben switches easily back and forth between his "good boy" and "bad boy" personas. (Maybe a bit too easily: he goes from a full blown drug addiction to being clean in a few seconds of screen time.) *BLT* climaxes in a single senseless and seemingly unmotivated act, much as the trashcan thrown through the

window triggers the riot in Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing*. But, unlike that film, there is no constant undercurrent of frustration and anger driving *BLT*. When Ben's moment comes, it is difficult to see what pushes him over the edge. Perhaps, it is writer/director Lin's intention to demonstrate how there is nothing but boredom and nihilism motivating this kid who seemingly has it all. If so, he is caught in a bit of a bind. Ben's spiritual emptiness, his most genuinely disturbing character trait, is also his least understandable trait, which lessens the audience's emotional investment in him and, in turn, limits the dramatic impact of the movie. I can understand Ben and am alternately impressed or disturbed by his actions, but I cannot really empathize with him. And ultimately, I feel the same way about the movie: a dazzling accomplishment, but one that left me a bit cold. – KF

DVDS

Volcano High (2001)
Starring: Hyuk Jang, Min-a Shin
Director: Tae-gyun Kim
Country: Korea

A stylish and satirical post-apocalyptic take on high school politics, *Volcano High* is very much in its own genre. Kim Kyung Soo (Jang) has been kicked out of school after school until he is finally sent to Volcano High. He is determined to graduate no matter what and wants no part of school politics. Unfortunately, he gets sucked into the intrigue, mystery and super-powered, hallway brawls that make up everyday life at Volcano High.

If you're looking something along the martial arts calibre of the Ping brothers, then look elsewhere. The selling point of the movie is its tongue-in-cheek, exaggerated characters enhanced by a slew of wirework and CG effects. This is not a film for the overly serious or pretentious at heart; it's a fun ride, but only if you allow it to be.

The disc says Region 3, but it will play on all DVD players, which is a treat because of the loaded extras including trailers, music videos and deleted scenes — one of which includes a girl flashing her panties in a school uniform for all you perverts out there. The only problem with it was that . . . well . . . I guess it's mostly my problem, because I don't understand or speak Korean, is that the extra bits are shown in sans English subtitles.

CINEMA SERVICE

CINEMA SERVICE

TOP: Smashing korean poster for *Volcano High*.
BOTTOM: Luscious...cinematography.

The most I can muster is answering the phone (*yobo sa-yo*) and that's only because I've watched one too many Korean films with teenagers answering their ever-ringing cell phones.

This was an impulse buy of the non-cheap variety at a cool $35 Cdn (and I bargained too!). But hey, this would have been a pretty cool impulse buy if I were a guy. – CM

Take Care of My Cat (2001)
Starring: Du-na Bae, Yu-won Lee, Ji-young Ok, Eung-sil Lee, Eun-Joo Lee
Director: Jeong Jae-eun
Country: Korea

Take Care of My Cat follows five Korean girls, newly graduated from high school, as they struggle to maintain their friendship as life slowly pulls them apart. This debut feature from director Jeong has certain elements that I have come to expect in Korean melodrama: a lot of selfish whining and a runtime that seems about 20 minutes too long. But overall, the film is actually quite good.

Jeong uses the device of the girls' text messages and phone calls to help tell this simple coming of age story. She pulls no punches when fully developing her characters making *Cat* one of those rare films that refuses to find easy answers. You can tell Jeong really trusts her talented cast to carry the drama.

There are a lot of goodies that can be found on the special edition two disc DVD set including interviews with all five cast members individually (if you understand Korean), deleted scenes (if you understand Korean) and a running commentary (if you understand Korean). There are also 2 shorts with English subtitles that Jeong did previous to *Cat* and a cute behind-the-scenes vignette that no one needs a translator for.

I can't remember how much I paid for this, but say hello to the folks at **YesAsia.com** if you want to pick this up. Or you can wait until Sony studios to cut this film up like stir-fry for North American release. – CM

CINEMA SERVICE
I should take public transportation more often.

Shopping For Fangs (1997)
Starring: Jeanne Chin, Radmar Jao, Clint Jung, John Cho.
Directors: Quentin Lee and Justin Lin
Country: Canada/USA

When *Shopping For Fangs* premiered at the 1997 Toronto International Film Festival, it caused a bit of a stir for being an American film partially financed with Canada Council money. Credit or criticize Canadian co-director, Quentin Lee, for hustling the cash. Lin and Lee have since gone their separate ways, but *Fangs* holds up today for being the strangest Asian-American film ever made.

In filmspeak, *Fangs* is an offbeat comedy/thriller featuring a frigid wife, a saucy lesbian waitress and a payroll clerk. Oh yes, there's also a werewolf, which arises from an in-joke about Asian men never shaving.

Fangs is a fun romp, full of cinematic references to Todd Haynes' *Safe*, Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* and Wong Kar-Wai's *Chungking Express* (the heroine wears the same trench coat and sunglasses as Brigitte Lin). Made for a song, the production values are uneven as is the acting and pacing. *Fangs* has its moments, but it's too episodic to hold together. The movie's really an exercise in genre-mixing and genre-breaking, and it is likely the first post-identity GenerAsian film.

Fangs is now found on DVD and video. In fact, it plays better on the small screen with a roomful of friends.

Now, if I could only figure out what the film was about… – AT

MARGIN FILMS

Famed MILF-hunter John Cho hits on someone his own age.

CDS

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Independent
www.ginamusic.com
Potential is the only word to describe Gina Lin's debut album *Julienne*. Filled with catchy acoustic guitar strums, soulful folk lyrics (in English and French) and a sweet voice, one can hear the building blocks for a solid career. The album reminds me of very early Emm Gryner without the over-emoting or an even more stripped down Sarah Harmer. As a fan of folk rock, I hope to hear future releases from Lin and hope she matches her talents with a producer who can bring her to the next level.
– CM

T – *Gemini*
World Music
www.worldmusic.co.kr/t
Born to a Korean mother and an African-American father, 21-year-old Natasha Shanta Reid has been variously known as Yoon Mi Rae, Tasha, Baby T, the queen of Korean hip hop and, more recently simply as T. *Gemini* is her second release and her first hip hop album. This is a solid set of tracks, in both Korean and perfect English, with special mention given to the Korean and English versions of "Memories (Smiling Tears)" featuring Japanese singer Sakura and rapper Sphere of Influence. *Gemini* could be that classic album that people will talk about for years to come. Fans of true hip hop will not be disappointed with this release. – CM

Corrinne May – *Corrinne May*
Independent
www.corrinnemay.com
Singapore born and Berkeley educated Corrinne May deserves so much more attention than she has received from her self-titled first album. After all, one would think winning a competition by writing music to lyrics by songwriting legends Carole King and Carole Bayer Sager would cause people to take notice. Honest lyrics and a breathy angelic voice give her catchy pop hooks an adult contemporary flair. May's material is geared to an older audience than most pop on the radio and it may not for everyone, but this is definitely a solid debut. – CM

Kevin So – *Shirts n Skinz*
WingBone
www.kevinso.com
There something about Kevin So's socio-political songwriting that makes his music very universal. Throughout his material there are sound bites from interviews and newsreels, sometimes imbedded in between bridge and chorus that stress the points in he is making in his songs. His latest release *Shirts n Skinz* is a mixture of pop, rock, jazz, blues and soul, which exactly what you would expect from For the Boston native. Honest, thought provoking and proudly Asian-American. – CM

Misia – *Kiss In the Sky*
Rhythmedia Tribe/avex trax
Following on the heels of last year's fantastic *Misia Remix 2002* album, *Kiss In The Sky* is a bit of a mixed bag. Misia juggles her soulful voice between her usual selection of ballads, urban pop and up-tempo dance numbers.

She fares best on ballads like "Nemurenai Yoru wa Kimi no Sei (My Sleepless Nights Are Because Of You)" and the disco-fied "Taiyou ga Iru Kara." Other songs like "Don't Stop Music" suffer from dated production and instrumentation, coming off sounding like a Max Martin-produced Britney Spears leftover. Misia's voice is strong as always, but she would be better off

working with producers who can bring her back to the R&B and House sound that she helped popularize in Japan. Still, gems like the beautiful "Tobikata wo Wasureta Chisana Tori" (featured in the *Star Ocean III* PS2 game) outweigh the clunkers. Let's hope her upcoming EP with So So Def's Jermaine Dupri will help remedy the situation.

– FYL

Sharyn MacEren – *Always Dreamin'*

Planet Hype

www.sharynmaceren.com

Previously known for her Billboard-charting single "Hard To Get" (under the moniker of "the S Factor"), California's Sharyn MacEren releases her latest full-length album full of up-tempo Pop and Dance grooves. Standout tracks include the summery "A Love Divine,""When the Record Spins" and the trance-inflected "A Little More Time." With all tracks produced by Glenn Gutierrez, (known for his work with Jocelyn Enriquez and Pinay) much of the music has a very retro Freestyle/Miami Bass style sound, reminiscent of artists like Cover Girls and Lil' Suzy. However, because one person produced all the songs, many sound too similar and have a tendency to sonically blend into each other. The bonus track called "Sharyn Uncovered" features MacEren singing a cappella versions of her songs. She has a good voice, and can reach even higher heights if she works with a variety of producers who can further develop her talents. Overall though, *Always Dreamin'* is full of cute and catchy Dance-Pop ditties, rivalling Kylie Minogue's *Fever* album. And, unlike Kylie and many other dance artists who are just chirpy vocalists fronting for producers, Sharyn writes both the lyrics and music for all of her songs. With her skills, Sharyn is a rising star that we should be looking out for. – FYL

Annie Lin – *East Coast Songs*

Ariadne Records

www.annielin.com

Houston, Texas based Annie Lin specializes in playing "acoustic pop folk." *East Coast Songs* contains eight new songs that showcase her melodic, storytelling lyrics and nimble guitar playing, honed from playing at cafes and live houses all over the US and festivals like the Asian-American Songwriters Showcase Tour. Annie's subject matter ranges from the mundane to the topical; on "Cut Out The Skyline," she tackles media coverage of the events of 9/11, wondering, "What do you do when you've hung your flag and the radio says that's all you can do?" Her style evokes artists like Edie Brickell and Lisa Loeb, but with a more aggressive and fun pop edge. The CD is intimate and engaging in nature and makes you feel like you're sitting at a cafe while Annie and her band plays for a small circle of their closest friends. – FYL

Pinay – *What Now*

Planet Hype

www.pinaydivas.com

A lot of things have changed for the sexy ladies of Pinay since we saw them last. Singers Loredie Lugos, Irma De Los Santos and Angelica Ablog have changed record labels and regrouped as a trio after seeing founding member Maylene Briones leave to go to medical school. Signing with Union City-based independent Planet Hype after their first album release on Classified/ Tommy Boy Records, *What Now* was recorded over a period of six months. Their sound on the new album has become more refined and confident, beating the dreaded sophomore jinx. With a variety of producers and songwriters including JP Nebres and Matt Villacarte, Pinay deliver a sweet mix of up-tempo Pop/R&B and smooth Slow Jams. Their voices sound very comfortable together, blending harmoniously and simultaneously complementing and highlighting each other's range. Highlights include the bouncy title track and a cover of The Jets' "You Got It All Over Him." "Unconditionally," written by Ablog, is a gospel-tinged ballad that brings forth the vocal power of the trio. What now, indeed for Pinay? It seems to me that greatness looms on the horizon. – FYL

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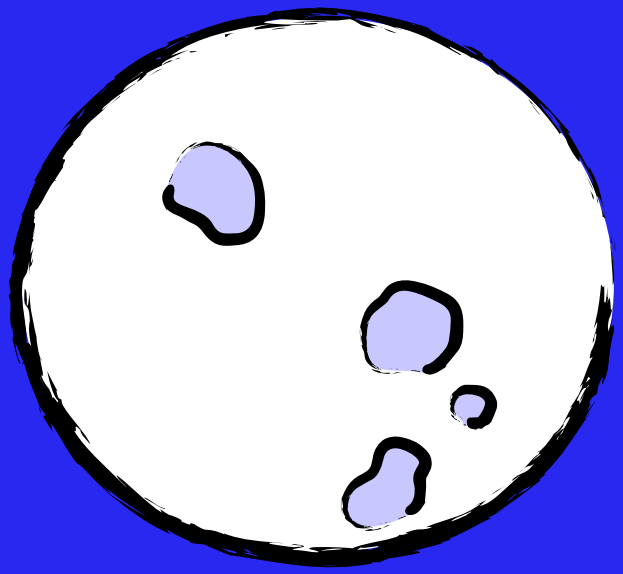

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FULL MOON

PUTTING DOWN ROOTS

by Yoony Judy Kim

KUAN KOO

deracinate v. – 1. To uproot. 2. To displace from one's native or accustomed environment.

I had this belief that deracination was the key to happiness.

From the moment I called the airline, the blood would pound through my veins as if shot full of energy boosters and it would not cease until my luggage was safely stowed in the overhead bin. New York, London, Toronto, Seoul; the single jobless life lends itself well to roaming and to the experiencing of different environments. The single jobless life embraces agitation of the everyday.

Still, I have now accepted as my reality what would have seemed ludicrous to me only a few years ago: a professional career. The prospect of spending countless days and nights in the same four classroom walls watching little boogers before they leave me behind for grander things didn't always seem appealing. I used to spend hours researching teaching positions abroad and deciding where my final uprooting would land me. But doing all that planning and wondering only led me to this question: can we really be happy staying where we are? Is perpetual deracination the magic gateway to happiness? It seems as though I always want to get away from here; yet, "here" is where I always am.

My still-young age of 23 doesn't give me much experience to evaluate what it takes to cultivate contentment. What do I know? Only that I was once satisfied with uprooting myself several times a year; but now can't remember what was so satisfying about it. I thought home was someplace you were to come back to, not stay at for living. Now I believe it is a place where personal memories and experiences of the everyday grow and flourish.

And here I am, my plump bottom planted on the couch sipping herbal tea and watching the Canucks on the tube. What should I make for dinner tomorrow? Is the laundry finished tumble drying? My thoughts wander and touch on memories of far off places as well as things closer to home. In the adjacent room there is a long plastic container with a clear domed lid. Inside are tiny peat pots with seeds safely planted. Oregano, Parsley, Basil. Tiny toothpicks hold up the signs proudly. If you look close enough, you'll see the seeds have just begun to sprout roots.

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See how happy this guy is? This can be you!